DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 335 CS 010 592

AUTHOR King, James R.
TITLE Critical Theory and Teaching Literacy.
PUB DATE Dec 90
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (40th, Miami, FL, November 27-December 1, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Advocacy; *Critical Theory; Elementary Secondary Education; Feminism; Higher Education; *Literacy; Social Theories

ABSTRACT

A broad base for understanding what critical literacy is can be created by understanding three views of critical theory: critical social theory, feminist theory, and child advocacy. When each is brought to bear on the schooling rituals associated with literacy instruction, interesting commonalities among the three views emerge. Critical approaches to literacy deal with a disenfranchised group, and the resulting agenda for critical literacy is one of empowerment. Students' access to the commodities, customarily controlled by teachers, is also an issue that is central to a critical approach to learners' engagement in real literacy acts. Together, these three lenses (radical criticism, feminism, and child advocacy) suggest alternative views of reading and writing as social constructs. (Seventy-six references are attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED333335

Critical Theory and Teaching Literacy

James R. King

University of South Florida

This paper was presented as part of Symposium 15
"Remedial as Other: Inside Learners' Critical Literacy"
at the 40th Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference
December 1990, Miami, FL.

CS010592

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James King

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

Critical Theory and Teaching Literacy

In this paper three views of critical theory are presented. These are critical social theory, feminist theory, and child advocacy. When each is brought to bear on the schooling rituals associated with literacy instruction, interesting commonalities between the three views emerge. These patterns are then presented as ones that may be characteristic of pedagogy for literacy based on a critical stance.

> Each child in a schoolroom is an actor in many dramas, some of which she writes, some of which were written long before she was born. That which she learns - reading and writing, for example - are part of this play of ideology...(Holtzman, 1987, p. 161).

The first time I brushed up against the idea of critical literacy was in 1981, when I received a copy of Shor's (1980) Critical Teaching and Everyday Life. I was teaching undegraduate students reading and writing methods and I figured the book would give me some insights into teaching my students how to teach their students to think critically, a skill that I determined they needed. Well, if you know this book, you will also know that Shor's work did not fulfill my expectations for it. Now, almost ten years later, I find myself returniing to Shor's writing to teach myself to think critically about the ways I use literacy with my students, my familly, and my friends. At the time my reaction to Shor was "What is this? This isn't CRITICAL THINKING!" I wasn't ready to make room for my students to think critically about teaching, to do the writing for their scripts in my class. I think what was unsettling at the time was that Shor was asking me to look critically at everything I was doing socially, culturally and politically in the classroom, as well as outside of it. This kind of request for restructuring was enough to make me put the book back on the shelf, and think "What a strange book."

It might be that when you read this, you'll react like I did to Shor in 1981. I hope not. But part of getting inside critical literacy, really inside, is a willingness to set aside the things you are used to "knowing" and to take a second look at those events, objects and acts that you "knew," but from another perspective. For some of us, this is not only work, but damn hard work. For me, it was/is difficult to realize that mine is but one of several

complimentary or conflicting perspectives. But the difficulties are compensated for by the joy in sharing perspectives with others to the end of forming a collective, shared sense of what events, objects and acts mean to us. What perspectives? Which acts, events and objects? Of course, I can go glibly overboard and suggest "everything." But that does little to further discussion about what I believe. For this paper, the focus is reading and writing, and the instruction that accompanies them. So that the events are literacy events. The objects are largely the texts; used, made, acted out, interpreted, and taught. The acts are social ones that involve the participants in ritualized dramas with these objects, in these these events.

The perspectives are many, as literacy has been embraced, fondled and even groped for interpetations by writers and researchers from several ideologies. And the concept of ideologies itself is somewhat ritualized. Holtzman (1987) explains:

> "Ideology" is a word with altogether too many meanings. It is the beliefs of people we do not respect; it is a kind of lie; it is a kind of political theology. But it also refers to the world of ideas itself, and it is this meaning I find too useful to give up in spite of the confusion (p. 158).

Certain similar or consistent beliefs or ways of seeing collect together, like a colony of coral, or a fist of barnacles. And when the writing and rhetoric establishes itself to the point of reflexivity, that is, where newer writings are about older writings in the same view, an ideology coelesces. Members of a shared ideology use their collective stance to critique events, objects and acts by using their ideological stance as lenses with which to view "things" and "stuff." Currently, several ideological camps are critiquing into reading and writing. For the most part, literacy is seen as a social construction, and is therefore subject to deconstruction by its critics. Much like the

deconstructionists of literary theory, the three critical views of literacy that follow use semiotics in the context of symbolic interactionism to "explain" literacy.

Radical Politics and Literacy (What?)

The heading does propose seemingly strange bedfellows. But a viable, well written, and much discussed approach to the deconstruction of literacy is found in the work of radical critical theorists such as Giroux (1988), Shannon (1989) Lankshear (1987), and Everhart (1983). From this lense, literacy is seen as a constructed, cultural product and process. As such, it reflects the structural and social inequities that may be found in the general culture. If one is unaccustomed to seeing inequality, then the task of coming to a critical stance which is based in that perspective is a more difficult one. Often, the underlying agenda in radical critical analysis is emancipation (Giroux, 1988). Emancipation as a rhetorical agenda requires that someone is oppressed and, within a Marxist ideology, the purpose of critique is empowerment. Likewise the purpose of empowerment is participant action that may lead to liberation from the oppression. Consistently oppressive or unequal conditions which are represented in social structure, either inside or outside classrooms, are examples of hegemony. Presumably, then, by becoming aware of and even naming these hegemonic levers (Friere, 1970; 1983; Freire & Macedo, 1987), we come to understand them. We may come to understand why it is that minority status, ethnicity, and socioeconomic levels are such persistent covariates for remedial status. In understanding, we become able to work toward changing the social, cultural, and political structures that created the hegemony.

Lankshear (1987) offers three different views of literacy from a radical view. The views seem to be in opposition, yet they are complimentary, depending on the viewer's interpretation. The first is of Freire's (1984) liberation

pedagogy and its component of literacy. Subordinate, or otherwise marginalized social groups can use literacy for political action aimed at resisting and restructuring present inequities in structural power, leading to change. In the case of Freirian literacy pedagogy, the approach is somewhat like Ashton-Warner's (1963) key words, for adults, and with political intent. Before disenfranchised illiterates can do political work, they learn to "name" the physical and political world around them. This naming is in the context of identifying the oppressive social and political factors which, according to Freirian pedagogy, conspire to keep disenfranchised and marginalized groups such. Reading the world is a necessary precursor to reading the word, which then enables them to "work [over] the world."

The second view offered by Lankshear (1987) is that dominate groups tend to remain dominant by offering their subordinates an inferior or "inappropriate" literacy. This view is supported by comparative descriptions of working class and ruling class schools (Ashendon, Connell, Dowsett, & Kessler, 1987) and by an explanation of the back to basics movement as a mechanism to slow educational expansion and thereby limit access to university by the lower classes (Quarter & Mathews, 1987). In addition, descriptions of literacy as it is constituted for remedial populations in schools offer more immediate examples of patterned illiteracy. Allington (1977, 1980, 1983) provides clear and consistent information regarding the differential instruction provided for those classed as less able. The discrepancies cover a multitude of sins including shorter wait time (Bozsik, 1981), relative difficulty of reading materials (Clay, 1979), teacher correction of miscue behavior (Alpert, 1974), and even the discourse frames used by teachers during remedial reading groups (Rist, 1970). While this may not look like a reproduction of social castes from a first glance, it is important to remember how students achieve (McDermott, 1985) and maintain their

remedial status in classroom reading instruction. Often they are placed based on test score information. Of course the relationships between achievement test performance and social class, as well as ethnicity, are well documented ones. So the social use of standardized tests causes reproduction of social and ethnic class structures in our classrooms. Yet, there is more.

In a discussion of the development of the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test, Gould (1981) documents that the very development of the Stanford Binet by Terman was a politically embroiled endeavour, fraught with a misinterpretation of Binet's original work, and born of questionable research methodology. Most importantly, Gould suggests that Goddard, another early interpreter of Binet's work, had an a priori agenda of eugenics and sought to justify such practices as sterilization of "morons" through the classification of individuals based on "objective" data. Yet, the Stanford Binet remains a standard against which other tests of intelligence are compared. Who knows what the current agenda for the use of these tests may be? That we offer differentiated literacy to those in different ability classes is hard to deny. How to understand what this may mean is not so clear. However, it is for me difficult to accept that we are training remedial students to be "less than" nonremedial students, and that the basis of these decisions is grounded in tests that represent little, if any, transferable reality to children's real strengths and needs, or indeed, a construct corresponding to real world literacy. I think the routine is something like this: "We have expectations that certain children will do less well in school. We identify them by race, by social class and even more insidiously, by behavior and communication styles. Then we use tests and testing methods that reify this aprori judgement, and a remedial caste is maintained."

Lankshear's (1987) third view is even more troubling than the previous two.

Essentially, in this third view, teachers and perhaps schools recognize these inequities as they are played out in classrooms and schools. As a result, curriculum is tailored to empower and facilitate students. For example, consider process writing approaches, or some of the various things that are being labelled whole language. But the potential paradox of this approach, from Lankshear's third perspective, is that teachers as well as other educators may never have had real intentions of sharing the power inherent in teaching. Rather, the empowerment of their students can be seen as teachers' manipulative ploys used to obtain their students' interests, as a way of controlling their behavior, their efforts, their productivity. This hypothesis can be tested anytime students want to do something that is counterproductive to teachers' agendas. Lankshear suggests that pondering whether or not this co-optation is intentional misses the point. From the students' perspective, they have "been had" to further the teacher's agenda of curriculum press and control. In effect, the beauracracy of the classroom, or the school, or the system swallows the protests, which were manifested in literate products, in a mesh of red tape, procedures, policies and rules.

A reflexive look at critical analysis has led Berthoff (1987) to suggest that education should not substitute for political action. Indeed, it is possible that education ritual, as a substitute for real learning is the biggest impediment (McLaren, 1986). Kuhn's (1973) notion of scientific communities and their pradigmatic shifts between established and emerging communities is helpful here. With no community and fewer dogmatic rituals, a community can emerge to account for phenomena in a cohesive narrative. But when paradigms that are established and entrenched are assaulted with critical analysis, they resist and even fight back.

Another lense into literacy is being focussed by feminists who critically analyze the way literacy, and knowing based on literacy, are often patriarchal constructions made to perpetuate male dominance. Gilligan (1982) suggests that "women [can] feel excluded from direct participation in society, [that] they see themselves as subject to a consensus or judgement made and enforced by the men on whose protection and support they depend" (p. 67). This perception can lead to "...a sense of vulnerability that impedes these women from taking a stand...[a] 'susceptability' to adverse judgements by others, which stems from [their] lack of power" (p. 66). This analysis points to the the underlying effects of marginalizing women's meaning, lives and language. Further, it makes a strong case for the existence of a female underclass created by sociosexual oppression, and maintained, at least in part, by the internalized response of the oppressed. Gilligan goes on to characterize women's disenfranchisement as "drifting along and riding it out.." creating the effect of "experience of women caught in opposition between selfishness and responsibility. Describing a life lived in response, guided by the perception of other's needs, they can see no way of exercising control without risking an assertion that seems selfish and hence morally dangerous" (p. 143). From my perspective, this paradox can also be seen to create a willingness for and tolerance for ambiguity, and a readiness to "question the idea that there is a single way to [teach] and that differences are always a matter of better or worse" (p. 143). For Gilligan, this paradox is cast in a contrast between the hierarchial and webbed social relationships that contextualize women's moral development. For me, this seems a ready stance to engage in the multiple perspective taking required in critical approaches to literacy. However, the very same marginalization has also contributed to what Gilligan has identified as a sense of powerlessness.

Webbed social structuring relies on interconnectedness and a wish to be at

the center of that connection (accompanied by fear of being at the edge). Despite perceived differences in power distribution, things will be fair, and everyone will be responded to and included. No one will be left out or hurt. It seems as if awareness of power hegemony is a fact of life, and once acknowledged, set adrift. In contrast, hierarchial models of social relations suggest inequality, separateness, fear of others and closeness. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) present similar ideas in a taxonnmy of women's ways of knowing. One way to know is received knowledge. For most men, knowing from others, or received knowledge, is often based on identification with authority. But women, who usually do not encounter other women as authorities, tend to view themselves outside the dichotomous relationship of "Authority-right-we" (p. 44). Of course women do listen and learn in social contexts, but according to Belenky, et al. (1986), it is with a connected perspective, rather than one that is dichotomous and separate, that many women come to know. Consequently, women who value and use received knowledge tend to use it it for self-advancement only if it is clear that self-advancement is also a means of helping others..."that they can strengthen themselves through the empowerment of others is essential wisdom" (p. 47).

Women's different ways of knowing have also been associated with characteristic discourse frames. Awareness of alternative perspectives, or a phenomenological epistomology, would certainly fit with Lakoff's (1975) findings regarding women's characteristic use of hedges and tag questions. Belenky, et al. (1986) also make a case for the "sharing of small truths" (116). According to this idea, the forms connected knowing takes approximate narratives. Support for the importance of narrative ways of constructing reality, or knowing, is found in Sarbin's (1983) psychotheraputic uses of narratives, Bruner's (1985) contrast of narrative and paradigmatic ways of knowing, and in current moves in

anthropological text syles toward the use of narrative reportage (Agar, 1986; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988; VanMaanen, 1988). One type of narrative is gossip.

> Gossip concerns the personal, the particular, and frequently the petty; but it does not follow that it is a trivial activity...The explicit information gossipers share concerns other people; but implicitly, gossipers tell each other about themselves by showing how they interpret the information they share...In connected knowing groups, people utter half-baked half-truths and ask others to nurture them. Since no one would entrust one's fragile infant to a stranger, members of the group must learn to know and trust each other. In such an atmosphere members do engage in criticism, but the criticism is connected. (Belenky, et al., 1986, p.116).

In a text for the general public (as distinguished by the publisher from her "scholarly books"), Tannen (1990) also details the use of gossip as a rhetorical form and a socio-political lever. Since Tannen's text compares women's and men's conversational repetroire, the discussion of gossip from a male perspective is negative and critical. But from a female perspective gossip is used to create and maintain relationships with other women. It can also be used as a display of linguistic competence, as a business context, as social control, and for a host of other purposes. For me, the point here is that feminist epistomologies and characteristically female discourse frames allow us to reconsider old, patriarchal social stuctures, including ways of thinking about thinking and ways of talking about talking. Even more to the point of critical literacy, alternative ways of seeing the world, or "knowing," have led feminist critics to alternative ways of teaching about teaching.

Schniedewind (1985) describes alternative teaching approaches, based on feminists' critical analysis of educational contexts. After critiquing

competitive goal structuring (ie, grading as limited commodities), Schniedewind presents several alternatives to hegemonic teaching practices, which she pulls from her experience. She suggests peer support, which is getting help in completing a task. In group task format, students engage cooperatively in commpletion of a project. Jigsaw format refers to collaboration in a task where no one is given enough information to complete the task independently. Finally, research project format engages students in cooperatively conducting a research project in a class context. For me, these project share some common intent. They share a socially grounded construction of knowledge, that enables a completion of the task or project. All approaches require interaction, collaboration, and cooperation among the participants. And all provide for unlimited access to the outcome commodities (grade, credit, etc.). This is clearly in line with expectations formed from Belenky, et al.'s (1986) findings. These also seem like appropriate frameworks to encourage real work by the students. However, when Schniedewind gives examples for each of the formats, the impetus for the projects she describes seem to be from Schniedewind's course agenda, and the content she "needed" to include in "a course." Clearly, in empowering pedagogy, whether from a feminist perspective in college, or from a child advocacy stance in a preschool, the psychological dynamics of topic and agenda choice seem immutable. Specifically, the agenda for a course and the topics selected to flesh out that agenda would come from student initiatives. More specifically, the jigsaw format troubles me because the underlying intent seems to be control on the part of the teacher. It seems like there is a mistrust at the root of an activity that was designed to coerce cooperation.

Schniedewind also discusses the dilemma of evaluation in in cooperative settings. She mentions group grades, contract grading, and individual accountability (all members of a group evaluated by means of a selected member's

performance). I am currently struggling with the the issues that surround these formats and strategies, and I have participated in these three scenarios, as well as other configurations, both as a teacher and as a full time student during the 1989-90 academic year. I find them to be frustrating, hard to enable, and most confusing. My students (and myself) are not accustomed to alternatives to traditional bell-curved grade distributions. In fact, Schniedewind offers little in the way of negotiating the politics of grade distribution, or changing what grades signify. But her acknowledgement of the problem is light years ahead of current practice in literacy. We are still wondering what can be measured (Farr & Carey, 1986).

Yet, even in the strengths that we may find in women's tolerance for ambiguity and collective sense of social meanings, that result from a devalued or politically marginalized life, we must also make room for the changes that will come from following these same leads. Heilbrun (1988) reminds us that some current feminist ideolgies have turned back to critique feminism reflexively. In this critique, early vitrolic feminism is viewed as shrill and strident, while newer approaches have become more subtle, cerebral, and urbane. Heilbrun writes:

> To denounce women for shrillness and stridency is another way of denying them any right to power. Unfortunately, power is something that women abjure once they perceive the great difference between the lives possible to men and to women, and the violence necessary to maintain their position of authority...But however unhappy the concept of power and control may make idealistic women, they delude themselves if they believe the world and the condition of the oppressed can be changed without acknowledging it. Ironically, women who acquire power are more likely to be criticized for it than are the men who have always had it...male defense of its own power has

> decreed that nothing is more ridiculous than a woman who imitates a male activity and is therefore no longer a woman. This can apply to speaking and writing, but also to the way a woman looks, the job she does...(p. 16).

If we really hope to transform classrooms and their literacy acts, we are taking on alot. My own experience (King, 1991) with female teachers writing the lives of other female teachers revealed self effacing heroes, who suffered quietly, nobly, and persevered through patriarchally induced hardships. Very few angry voices were heard. In fact, that the authors peopled their narratives with long suffering heroes suggests that they valorized such nonconfrontive tolerance for inequity. And even in this, there is current work by newer feminist scholars concerning the radical resistance embodied in women's social silence (Lewis, 1990).

One possible solution, that also feels like a general statement for feminist pedagogies, feminist epistomologies, and for me, a good idea for any critical teaching, is what Lather (1991) has called problematizing the curriculum. For Lather "the course" becomes a lab for inventing the course. The issues which normally beset a transition to a learner centered context become the curriculum. So that if there is an expectation for a bell-shaped distribution of grades, then the issue from which to learn about the education context is the notion that grades are perceived to be a limited commodity. This may be a pragmatic fact, but it is "a fact" that can viewed as another patriarchal myth of scarcity and competition (Gross & Averill, 1983).

More Than Cute

Yet another lense into classroom literacy comes from a view of early childhood. From this approach, children are seen as natural language learners, with, some say, genetic hardwiring for language acquisition. Since reading and writing are also language processes, their acquisition is for some a matter of

practice (Smith, 1977), with enhancement coming from adult modelling and feedback. In this approach to literacy, teachers become facilitators or mentors of literacy. Children approximate more complex literate acts, as the adults around them scaffold the efforts of these noviates (Purves, 1990). Yet, somewhat paradoxically, the efforts of these younger scribes are often seen in condescending or patronizing ways, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. For example, Sutton-Smith's (1983) investigation of preschoolers' construction of narratives reveals systematic differences between adults' and children's stories in both the products and processes of their formation. These characteristic discrepancies between adult and child models of the subjective world have often been evaluated by adults who tend to see "real" reality from their own perspectives. Hence, approximations by younger humans have been labelled cute to save us from being negatively critical. Yet, to me systematically devaluing children's labors and works with a "cute" dismissal is neither kind nor accurate.

No wonder child centered approaches to literacy such as invented spelling (Bissex, 1980; Read, 1971) have engendered considerable resistance. Accepting approximations means giving up the authority and power inherent in the "correctness mythology" and its symbolic enactment in "evaluation" and "grading." Quite similarly, response centered (that is reader and child centered) approaches to beginning reading have met with a great deal of resistance. The reading community turned a deaf ear to Bettelheim (1975, Bettelheim and Zelan, 1981) and his call for more response oriented literacy learning. Of course, Bettelheim's Freudian interpretations and his personal approach to teaching (Darton, 1990) have been questioned. Certainly, Bettelheim's reliance on psychoanalytic perspectives can be critiqued from post-Freudian psychotherapies and feminist perspectives (cf. Landau, 1986), as well

as others. The point is that his calls for centering on children's versions of reality were not heard. Adelman (1989), who suggests similar sensitivity toward the meaning of children's play, may get a better response from educators, as play becomes the work of children. This may be a more comfortable metaphor, appealing obliquely, as it does to a Calvinist work ethic. Fortunately, Adelman painstakingly elicits an insider perspective from children as they detail their interpretations of the daily rituals of preschool classrooms. And despite Adelman's data to the contrary, play may is often not regarded as so "important" as literacy. So children may be allowed appropriate play, but then may also need to endure prepacked, managed approaches to "reading readiness."

Conversely, in child centered literacy, with focus on children and what they can do and what they do know, learners are engaged to the degree that they are able in reading and writing real texts, for real audiences, about real stuff. The initiative and maintainance of the literate efforts and events comes from the learners. The adults, in turn, are engaged in learning about the children's literate learning. From this relationship between students and their teachers, it is at least understandable why the teacher as researcher movement has found a happy home in the field of early literacy. After all, publishing is a reason for reading and writing (Graves, 1983).

Theory in this camp is not so removed from the context that embodies it. Unlike the radical pedagogies and feminist scholars, child advocates keep their theorizing close to their vests and nested in vignettes. Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986) have had powerful transformative effects on elementary writing praxis, or theory as it is played out in practice. And that has continued to be the field of effort - classrooms. The usual rhetoric on models and metaphors has been considerably less specified and the approach less determined than one would expect. But this is not without benefits. Without the constraints of

expectation, process and child centered writing continues to reinvent itself. What has emerged to accomodate the teacher researchers' stories is a narrative case study genre.

Rereading "More Than Cute" it occurred to me that I may be stretching things a bit to call child advocacy in literacy a form of critical literacy. But, even with reflection, I don't think this is off base. The issue for me is to critically view literacy, especially emergent literacy (Teale & Sulzby, 1988), from the presumed visage of the youngster. And, I suppose, since children are developmentally powerless, they require advocates. This view is supported by Lund and Duchan (1988), who acknowledge the effects of power differentials in adult-child communication settings.

> Adults typically have more power than children because they are more self sufficient and capable of managing their world through greater size, knowledge, and resources, and also because they are in a position to manage the child's world through meting out pleasures and punishments" (p. 73).

Teachers' use of terms of endearment (honey, sweetie, kiddoes) and their evaluation of children's work as cute connote power asymetries when the children are not allowed similar linguistic intimacies. In power positions, teachers are also allowed (expected?) to use more directive language (sit there, don't touch, do it right now). Participation structures, in general (turn taking, terms of address, direct constructions), can also be seen as reflections of power asymetries.

While these relationships are neither news nor surprizing, it is important to re-view them as social structures that maintain power differentials. More pragmatically, it is vital to understand how such patterns of inequity affect children. In research on "motherese", or talk from mothers to their children, directives typically diminish infants' and toddlers' response repetroire. In

short, imperatives from adults are not facilitative when viewed from children's reactions to them.

Katz (1977) also addresses the dynamics of teachers in the contexts of preschools, suggesting that powerlessness is congruent with immaturity. While youngsters "may bite, vomit, wet, or 'act out'...[their] power to modify adults' responses is relatively small" (p. 71). She further suggests that because of the automatic hegemonic relationship between adults and children in the confines of classrooms, that the ethics of childcare workers become increasingly important.

Yet, Lubeck's (1985) comparative study of Black and white daycare centers suggests that such top-down remedies for ethical concerns in preschoolers' care may not be sensitive enough. Much like the way literacy was cuturally related and configured in Heath's (1983) cross ethnic, cross social class study, Lubeck found daycare in these two different contexts to uses commodities like time, space, materials, and communication structures in very different ways. So that to implement "a change" means that the same change applied in both contexts would mean differently. And from the children's perspectives, have very different effects.

Nelson's (1989) edited volume, Narratives from the crib, presents an alternative approach to understanding a child's reality. A two-year-old, Emily, was audiotaped from her crib for a time span. Then, several researchers from different backgrounds analyzed these tapes, constructing separate, yet complimentary, versions of Emily's reality. These included a new speech genre, narrative re-creation of the world, representation of real life experience, a linguistic construction of self in time, problem solving, as well as other interpretions. Multiple views on children's construction of reality was the central theme of the text.

Smith (1983) suggests similar views for adults working in the arena of children's literate realities. Relying on the "culture of literacy" (the values, beliefs, techniques, skills, and social statuses associated with reading and writing), he suggests that in fact reading and writing appear to be adaptive processes. Youngsters in non-school settings read and write as needed by their circumstances, which are always bound by the local culture, and its conceptions of literacy. Therefore, some culture groups may not view reading and writing as they are conceptualized in schools. Further, he suggests that teachers only count some reading and writing acts, while discounting others. This belief, unchecked, leads teachers to a stance of "count[ing] only-what-is-taught syndrome" (p. 177). Finally, Smith suggests a new understanding of children, sensitivity to children's cultures of literacy, and pedagogy that makes room for subjective, interactive literacies.

Unfortunately, the drama of interpretation between child advocates in literacy and their critics has taken on other battles in the name of children. A recent interchange in Educational Researcher between McKenna, Robinson, and Miller (1991) and Edelsky (1991) actually had very little to do with children and empowering them to critical use of reading and writing in order to "read their worlds." These paradigmatic debates, while interesting, are not about freeing up pedagogy, or even freeing up research about that pedagogy. Rather, they read like the incantations from Eco's The name of the rose. Emig (1990) has written somewhat more even temperedly regarding the politics of emergent literacy research, and what counts as research in emergent literacy. Clearly, the value of a given research effort varies as it is evaluated by competing paradigms. Emergent literacy must compete with others. Emig mentions Hirsch's (1987) cultural literacy and the deconstructionist literary theorists. As is customary, popular press (for cultural literacy) and university discourses (for

deconstructionists) have defined what is literacy for these two paradigms. This has not been the case for emergent literacy. Until recently, only a few publishing houses and a few journals have given space to child centered literacy rhetoric. Rather, emergent literacy has grown in context, passed like tupperware, grounded in children's and their teachers' realities and largely facilitated by females. In contrast, the other two paradigms mentioned by Emig, especially cultural literacy, have been handed down by patriarchal hegemony as "the thing" that must be done (or undone for the deconstructionists). In both camps, the players are male.

Doing Critical Literacy

One reason I have presented different lenses into critical literacy is to create a broad base for understanding what "it" is. A second reason was to make the point that critical literacy is not an approach. There cannot be one thing called critical literacy, nor can there be one way to teach it. In fact, much like the elusive "psycholinguistic method," teaching critically is axiomatic with no predetermined methodology. Problematizing methodology is, in fact, the deconstructive work of its practitioners. Yet, there are some consistencies in the above mentioned ideologies and the learning and teaching that, in my opinion, would characteristically occur in each of them.

First, critical approaches to literacy deal with a disenfranchised group, or otherwise relatively less powerful contingent. For radical critics, the hegemony that produced the inequities may be found in racial, economic, and linguistic issues. For feminists, the issues are socialization processes inherent in cultural constructs of patriarchy, or men's need to and power to dominate (Anderson, 1989). For child advocates, the issues are the devaluing of children's realities based on adult constructions of reality. In all three, there is a marginalized group that is invited to reinvent what it means to do

literacy without the restraints of predetermined social roles, prepackaged curriculum, and overdetermined teaching.

As a result of working with marginalized groups, the agenda for critical literacy is one of empowerment. For the most part, teaching and learning that empower participants tend to situate the learners in their learning. That is, learners have a stake in the planning, the process, and the product of the learning project. Anderson (1989) suggests that as empowerment becomes a mainstream educational construct, its "radical [transformative] currency has been devalued" (p. 260). Yet, the construct is still a major agenda for any critical approach to teaching. Indeed, Anderson's despair over radical chic lexicon does not preempt his list of "research strategies available to the critical ethnographer concerned about informant empowerment" (p. 216). He lists oral histories, informant narratives, and collaborative research. Each can situate the learners in the learning, but none does so axiomatically. The teachers' roles vis-a-vis each of these projects is a critical link. The paradox of critical literacy, especially as it is carried out in classrooms, is that the power of empowerment is always a commodity ultimately owned by the teachers. The degree to which the teacher becomes a facilitator of students' self-initiated, self-motivated learning, is the extent to which learners can become empowered. It is the teacher who allows or prevents the formation of cooperative and collaborative social interaction.

Students' access to the commodities, customarily controlled by teachers, is also an issue that is central to a critical approach to learners' engagement in real literacy acts. These commodities can be as inoccuous as topics for written compositions or as charged as grades for the nine week marking period. As far as selecting topics for writing, Graves (1983) suggests that students' ownership of their writing is essential to their growth as writers. However, when this

radical notion of students owning their own work is actualized in classrooms, teachers are confused as to how they can accomodate that kind of ideology as teacher behavior during writing (Gasser, 1990). This same realization is at the heart of Giroux's (1987) critique of Donald Graves' approach to literacy.

> I want to conclude by pointing out that Professor Graves' approach to learning is not simply about empowering students, it is also about empowering teachers, which in my mind is the precondition to the success of any learning process...If teachers are to take an active role in raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and the larger goals for which they are striving, it means that they must take a more critical role in defining the nature of their work as well as shaping the conditions under which they work. (pp. 179-80).

As far as the distribution of grades, several options are available. Schniedewind (1985) suggests group outcome grades, contract grades, and individual's work representing the entire small group. In a recent undergraduate course I taught, students each selected a grade that they needed for the course. The points related to each grade were negotiated as a group in the class, with certain point values associated with each grade. Then each student drafted a contract that addressed seven competencies that I needed for the course. These contracts were critiqued by peers and myself and when enough peers and myself approved the draft, it became a contract for the grade. With thirty-five students, and several drafts for contracts and projects, it was hard work. Poole (1972) calls access to permissions, turns, content, and process decisions "ethical space." I contend that there is a strong relationship between students' ownership of ethical space and the degree of resistance in the social life of a classroom. To the extent that literacy can be defined as commodities available for students' ownership (time use, unit planning, seating

arrangements,...), these issues of ownership are also part of the students' literacy learning.

Critical literacy as it is constructed in classrooms necessarily deals with real reading and writing, for real audiences, to accomplish real work. The agenda shifts from a focus on learning reading and writing to one of using reading and writing as tools and using literacy as a context for political work. Within the context of doing the work, learners use and refine their literate competencies. Reading and writing are often used in the context of a project that hosts the work of the class (King, 1991). In describing the researcher's relationship to data in critical ethnography, Anderson (1989) refers to the role of reflexivity as a "self-reflective process that keeps [a] critical framework from becoming the container into which the data are poured. " (p. 254). I think the same cautions are in order for teachers engaged in critical pedagogy. Reflexivity causes teachers to re-view their involvement in the literacies constructed in their class. Similarly, learners use of their own reading and writing as data to learn about their reading and writing is an example of teaching reflexively, which Heath, King, et al. (in preparation) has called inside learning.

Together, these three lenses, radical criticism, feminism, and child advocacy, suggest alternative views of reading and writing as social constructs. Further, within each of these ideologies, approaches to forming newer models of literacy are possible. For the most part, these approaches to literacy deal with empowering disenfranchised learners to an enhanced sense of self through literacy. Critical literacy often takes the structure of projects which use literacy to complete the task through collaboration and cooperation. Like critical ethnography (Anderson, 1989), critical literacy is socially grounded and generative. Like action research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983), it is responsive to and based on contextually derived problems which are isolated for a change

agenda. Like collaborative, interactional learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1975), it involves all participants in the social construction and the collective maintainance of the research as praxis. The learning experience itself becomes the evolving text, as it is interpreted inside the social context, or contexture (Robbins, 1989).

One Last Look

Perhaps as a critical look at this look at critical literacy, some cautions are in order. Critical literacy is change. It isn't just about change. It is change itself. Teaching critically is to change teaching; to teach about change, and to create opportunities for learners to change themselves and their classrooms. Because of this, it can't be foisted on teachers as the next thing that they must do. Change is the business of changers, and in suggesting critical approaches to classroom literacy as well as work with participants within classrooms, we can only hope to provide opportunities for others' change.

Another caution is somewhat more political, but similar to the dilemma above. Elasser and John-Stiener (1977) make a strong case for the interconnectedness of educational intervention and outside of school social change. Citing southern subsistance farmers and Navaho peoples, they suggest that students' emerging awareness of power, or more aptly powerlessness, in either school or community must effect the other context. In a powerful way, Haig-Brown (1988) makes a similar case in an oral history account of Native American Squamish people, who were educated in oppressive Jesuit residential schools. These three examples are similar in that they point out the effects of marginalization and how socio-political forces in both home and school mitigate against students having success in either context.

As teachers, working to implement critical approaches to literacy in our classrooms, we must responsibly ask ourselves "To what end?" If we seek to

empower children and other learners so that they may assume more control over their lives, we must also consider whether that independence will be consistently valued as the students enter subsequent classrooms. If we empower students only to the point where we are comfortable, I would suggest that this is a cruel joke, and a manipulation of our positions.

References

Adelman, C. (February 24, 1988). Observations on play as reflections on doing. Keynote address at the Tenth Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Agar, M. (1986). Speaking of ethnography. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Allington, R. (1973). If they don't get to read much, how they ever gonna get better? Journal of Reading, 21, 57-61.

Allington, R. (1980). Teacher interruption behaviors during primary oral reading. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 72, 371-74.

Allington, R. (1983). Reading instruction provided for readers of differing reading abilities. Elementary School Journal, 83, 348-53.

Alpert, J. (1974). Teacher behavior across ability groups. Journal of Educational Psychology, 66, 348-53.

Anderson, G. (1989). Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions. Review of Educational Research, 59, 249-270.

Ashendon, D., Connell, B., Dowsett, G. and Kessler, S. (1987). Teachers and working class schooling. In D.W. Livingstone (Ed.), Critical pedagogy and cultural power (pp.245-268). South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Ashton-Warner, S. (1963). Teacher. NY: Simon and Schuster.

Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R. and Tarule, J.M. (1986). Women's ways of knowing: The devlopment of self, voice, and mind. NY: Basic Books.

Berthoff, A. (1987). Foreword. In P. Freire and D. Macedo, Literacy: Reading the word and world (pp. xi-xxiii). South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Bettelheim, B. (1975, 1989). The uses of enchantment. NY: Random House. (1989) Vintage Books Edition, NY: Random House.

Bettelheim, B. and Zelan, K. (1981). On learning to read: The child's fascination with meaning. NY: Knopf.

Bozsik, B. (1981). A study of teacher questioning and student response interaction during the pre story and post story portions of reading comprehension lessons. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, PA. (University Microfilm No. 8202227).

Bissex, G. (1980). GYNS AT WRK: A child learns to write and read. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S.K. (1983). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. NY: Allyn and Bacon.

Bruner, J. (1985). Narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought. In E. Eisner

(Ed.), Learning and teaching the two ways of knowing: 84 th NSSE yearbook, pt. 2 (pp. 97-115). Chicago: NSSE.

Calkins, L.M. (1986). The art of teaching writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. (1986). Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Darton, N. (Sept. 10, 1990). "Beno Brutalheim"? A revered child psychologist comes under attack for abusive methods. Newsweek, 54-60.

Edelsky, C. (1990). Whose agenda is this anyway? A response to McKenna, Robinson, and Miller. Educational Researcher, 19, 7-11.

Elasser, N. and John-Steiner, V. (1977). An interactionist approach to advancing literacy. Harvard Eduactional Review, 47, 355-369.

Emig, J. (1990). Contexts. In L.M. Morrow and J.K. Smith (Eds.), Assessment for instruction in early literacy (pp. 219-225). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Everhart, R. (1983). Reading, writing and resistance: Adolesence and labor in a junior high school. Boston: Routledge, Kegan Paul.

Farr, R. & Carey, R. (1986). Reading: What can be measured?(2nd Ed.) Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Freire, P. (1970, 1984). Pedagogy of the oppressed. NY: The Continuum Publishing Co.

Freire, P. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. Journal of Education, 165, 5-11.

Freire, P. and Macedo, D. (1987). Literacy: Reading the word and the world. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Gasser, J.G. (1990). Teacher and student verbal interaction: The construction of meaning in reading and writing. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX.

Geertz, C. (1988). Works and lives: The anthropologists as author. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Giroux, H. (1988). Literacy and pedagogy of voice and political empowerment. Educational Theory, 38, 61-75.

Giroux, H. (1987). Critical literacy and student experience: Donald Graves' approach to literacy. Language Arts, 64, 175-181.

Gould, J. (1981) The mismeasure of man. NY: Norton.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Graves, D. (1983). Writing: Teachers and children at work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gross, M. and Averill, M.B. (1983). Evolution and patriarchal myths of scarcity and competition. In S. Harding and M.B. Hintikka (Eds.), Discovering reality (pp.71-95). NY: Reidel Publishing Co.

Haig-Brown, C. (1988). Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school. Vancouver, BC: Tillacum Press.

Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Heath. S.B., King, J.R. and others. (In Preparation). Inside learners. NY: Teachers College Press.

Heilbrun, C.G. (1988). Writing a woman's life. NY: Ballentine Books.

Hensley, R. (1989). Instructional choices in language arts: Illusion or reality? Unpublished masters thesis, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX.

Hirsh, E.D. (1987). Cultural literacy. NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Holtzman, M. (1987). Nominal and active literacy. In M. Cooper and M. Holtzman (Eds.), Writing as social action (pp. 157-73). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Johnson, D. and Johnson, R. (1977). Learning together and alone: Cooperation, competition, and individualization. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Katz, L. (1977). Talks with teachers: Rflections on early childhood education. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

King, J.R. (1991). Collaborative life history narratives: Heroes in reading teachers' tales. Qualitative Studies in Education.

Kuhn, T. (1973). The structure of scientific revolutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, R. (1975). Language and women's place. NY: Harper and Row.

Landau, M. (1986). Trespassing in scientific narrative: Grafton Elliot Smith and the temple of doom. In T. Sarbin (Ed.), Narrative psychology(pp. 45-64). NY: Praeger.

Lankshear, C. (1987). Literacy, schooling, and revolution. NY: Falmer Press.

Lather, P. (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. NY: Routledge, Chapman, Hall.

Lewis, M. (April, 1990). Framing: Women and silence: Disrupting the hierarchy of discursive practices. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association. Boston, MA.

Lubeck, S. (1985). Sandbox society: Early education in Black and white

America. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press/Taylor & Francis.

Lund, N.J. & Duchan, J.F. (1988). Assessing children's language in naturalistic contexts (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

McDermott, R. (1985). Achieving school failure: An anthropological approach to illiteracy and social stratefication. In H. Singer and R. Ruddell Eds.), Theoretical models and processes in reading, 3rd Ed. (pp. 558-74). Newark, DE: IRA.

McKenna, M., Robinson, R., & Miller, J. (1990). Whole language: A research agenda for the nineties. Educational Researcher, 19, 3-6.

McLaren, P. (1988). Schooling as ritual performance.

Nelson, K. (1989). Narratives from the crib. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Poole, R. (1972). Toward deep subjectivity. NY: Harper and Row.

Purves, A. (1990). The scribal society: An essay on literacy and schooling in the information age. NY: Longman.

Quarter, J. and Mathews, F. (1987). Back to the basics. In D.W. Livingstone (Ed.), Critical pedagogy and cultural power (pp. 99-120). South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Read, C. (1971). Preschool children's knowledge of English orthography. Harvard Educational Review, 41, 411-451.

Rist, R. (1970). Student social class and teacher expectations. Harvard Educational Review, 40, 411-51.

Robbins, M. (1990). School contexts of literacy instruction. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX.

Sarbin, T. (1983). The narrative as a root metaphor for psychology. In T. Sarbin (Ed.) Narrative psychology (pp. 3-21). NY: Praeger.

Schniedewind, N. (1985). Cooperatively structured learning: Implications from feminist pedagogy. In B. H. Davis (Ed.) Feminist education (pp. 74-87). A special topic edition of Journal of Thought, 20, 74-87.

Shannon, P. (1989). Broken promises: Reading instruction in twentieth-century America. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Shor, I. (1980). Critical teaching and everyday life. Boston: South End Press.

Smith, D. (1983). Reading and writing in the real world world: Explorations into the culture of literacy. In R.P. Parker and F.A. Davis (Eds.), Developing literacy: Young children's use of language (pp. 173-189). Newark, DE: IRA.

Smith, F. (1977). Making sense of reading - and reading instruction. Harvard Educational Review, 47, 386-395.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1983). Children's fiction making. In T. Sarbin (Ed.), Narrative psychology (pp. 67-90). NY: Praeger.

Tannen, D. (1990). You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation. NY: Morrow.

Teale, W. and Sulzby, E. (1988). Emergent literacy. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Van Maanen, J. (1989). Tales of the field: On writing ethnography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.